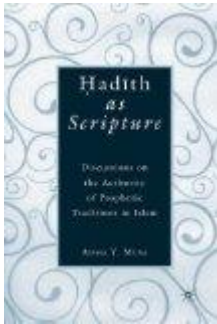


Hadith as Scripture by prof. Aisha Y. Musa

Book review by AY Mol



"Hadith as Scripture is the only book that covers both the earliest and most recent discussions on the authority of the Hadith. The authority of Hadith is a concern to Muslims in their daily lives, as well as a question of academic interest. Hadith as Scripture contains the first-ever Western language translation of the earliest extant text on the subject. This work explores the earliest extant discussions on the authority of the Hadith in Islam and compares them with contemporary debates."

In modern Islamic movements, a new trend has emerged, created because of the need to reform the Muslim society to make it progressive and 'to keep up with the times'. Famous reformers, Muhammad Abduh and Sayyid Qutb for example, were more focussed on the Qur'an and its message, than the Hadith and other historical materials deemed important as a basis for Islam. Their reason was that only the Qur'an could be seen as timeless and flexible in its usage and meaning so as to be applicable for modern society and knowledge. This trend was taken further, and eventually many reformers and groups became to renounce all historical material next to the Qur'an as unusable or even as false teachings, and have come to accept only the Qur'an as the major or only source for their ideas of what Islam is about.

These reform ideas have been seen as heretical by the majority of traditional schools in Islam and attacked and labelled as dangerous and blasphemous. As the majority of Muslims are still being deeply controlled by the traditional schools, these reform movements have always stayed a minority among the majority, and have been successful only in certain countries and social classes. But these 'Qur'an alone' reformers and followers kept popping up over the decades in all Muslim countries, and now in the age of the Internet have grown into a large community and are thus being taken more seriously, and are gaining attention and interest among the general Muslim public.

The 'Qur'an alone' or 'mostly focused on the Qur'an' movements are mostly labelled by the traditional Islamic schools as results of Western Orientalist research, who from the beginning of the 19th century have written many books critical of the reliability of the Hadith and other historical materials. Thus the 'Qur'an alone' movements are labelled as apologetic or caused by Western attacks on Islam, and thus are not based on Qur'anic teachings itself, but simply on Western beliefs and methods of viewing Islam. It is labelled as a 'Western caused' movement.

This tactic is similar to the treatment of the Medieval schools of Kalam and Mu'tazilah, who used Reason (*aql*) to interpret the Qur'an and its doctrines (*tafsir bi'l-Ra'y*). Most of these schools only accepted Mutawwir Hadith, historical reports that had multiple chain-sources. These were themselves miniscule in number compared to the accepted majority of Hadith based on simpler and more easily falsified transmission chains. And even the Mutawwir Hadith were approached with caution by these schools of Kalam. Many of the rational methods of the Kalam were taken to a certain degree into the later formed traditional schools, but their major beliefs on the Qur'anic message and their approach to the Hadith were rejected and deemed false, and thus non-Islamic (Western) teachings, created through the influence of the Greek philosophy.

When Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, GA Parwez, Muhammad Iqbal and other reformers in the 19th and 20th century came to use the same arguments and conclusions as the Mu'tazilah, while most of the time not ever referring to them, they were labelled as neo-Mu'tazilah, conforming to the Western (and colonial ruler) judgment on Islam and its history.

They were accused of blindly believing Orientalists such as Goldziher, Schacht, Muir and others who attacked Islamic history as unreliable and many Qur'an interpretations as illogical and superstitious. Scholar Daniel Brown in his book ["Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought"](#) began to research these reformers and their methods and came to very different conclusions. According to him, many of these reformers based their ideas on the Qur'an itself and their personal research into the historical reliability of Islamic records, and believed to have found contradictions and falsified records. Thus these reformers came to the same conclusions as several Orientalists, but were not influenced by them. The traditional schools still outlawed their works or ordered rulings their work must not be read, and so many of the reformist ideas never gained firm ground in the Muslim mind.

In the late 20th and beginning 21st century, new 'Qur'an alone' reformers and groups have emerged and now have the power of the internet to spread their ideas. Although these were also branded as heretic by the traditional schools, the Internet has created a platform which could be reached easily by the Muslim majority, and thus has more impact. Also [the works of Parwez](#) for example, who belonged to the pre-Internet reform movement, have been rediscovered by many Muslims, as they are freely available on the web and translated into English and other languages, which was not possible before. And so the 'Qur'an alone' movement is gaining ground by the anarchistic and almost unbannable word-wide web.

But the same arguments are still used against them; they are Western creations or apologetic movements. Just as Brown, Professor Aisha Musa asked herself: Is this true, is it a Western creation, or is there some truth in their arguments? Having been herself part of the reform movements for a long time, she had seen the many accusations laid against the movement. As a professor having a degree in Islam, and thus having the education and knowledge to perform a professional inquiry, she focused on two areas which were not discussed by Brown in his book. One is a research into the question: If the idea of the Qur'an alone is based on arguments found within the Qur'an itself, shouldn't the idea of the Qur'an alone be the orthodox movement, instead of the traditional pro-Hadith schools? The second question concerned researching the movement of the late 20th and present 21st century movements- the modern day Internet-based groups, which were not covered by Brown. Are they a product of Western society?

The difference from Brown's book is that Musa searched for traces of evidence of similar discussions between the 'Qur'an alone' and 'Hadith accepting' schools and groups in the first centuries of Islam. If the 'Qur'an alone' arguments are sound, these must have been part of almost every age in Islam from day one, and indeed they were she shows.

Caliph Umar, the second ruler of Islam, was known for his rejection of the recording of Hadith. The reformers use this as a proof for their rejection of Hadith, while the Hadith-accepting groups that now form the traditional schools say he only did this because Umar didn't want the Qur'an to be recorded wrongfully, so he only allowed oral transmittal of Hadith. This prohibition of recording Hadith came from the Prophet itself it was said, and was upheld till as late as 70 years after the Prophet. The then ruling Caliph ordered scholars to write Hadith down, but they did this reluctantly. And as much time had passed and much strife had occurred among the Muslim societies, false Hadith were abundant in such a degree that most Hadith scholars in the second Islamic century rejected at least 90% of the Hadith they collected. But these were the historical question-of-reliability arguments which were already discussed by Brown. And so Musa goes on and searches for Qur'an-based arguments against Hadith or outside sources.

She found none, no documents written by a person that could be labeled as 'Qur'an alone' in the first centuries could be found. But the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence; and so Musa used a different tactic by reviewing the earliest pro-Hadith documents, as then we could deduce what arguments the Qur'an-aloners used. This tactic had also been used to deduce the doctrines of early Christian sects, and also for the Mu'tazilah by early 19-20th century scholars as almost no Mu'tazilah documents survived in common main Muslim libraries, and so by reviewing the opponents of the Mu'tazilah it could be understood what the Mu'tazilah believed by seeing what their opponents accused them of or argued against. In the middle of the 20th century, old copies of Mu'tazilah books were found in some libraries in Yemen, and so finally the works themselves could be read. Many of the deduced conclusions of what Mu'tazilah believed turned out to be correct.

Musa uses two main pro-Hadith texts written by two famous scholars of orthodox Islam. Shafi, founder of the Shafi school and labelled as the first scholar who made both Hadith and Sunnah as divine sources in Islam. And the later follower Ibn Qutayba. Both scholars have written books against the Qur'an alone ideology and thus showed that the Qur'an alone movements were present in their lifetimes and even important and known enough to write books for to attack them. She has found the proof she was looking for. Musa breaks their texts down and discusses how the pro-Hadith groups won their arguments over the majority and also which Qur'an verses were used by both sides. Her analysis is thorough and well explained. Shafi's text is not considered as simple, but Musa shows step by step Shafi's method in a very clear way. Next to reviewing their work and arguments, she also delivers the immense work of translating Shafi's *Kitab Jima'al-Ilm*, the Book of Amalgamation of Knowledge, for the first time into English, which must have been an extremely difficult task since the text's style and Classic Arabic form is not easy to read and understand.

Then she goes on discussing the modern Qur'an-alone movements, their founders and their arguments. She has found that these founders-Rashad Khalifa, Subhy Mansour, Edip Yuksel, Kassim Ahmad and several groups, are not persons coming from the West, but from traditional Muslim backgrounds, and were all brought up in Islam. All of them were highly knowledgeable in the Qur'an and Hadith, as for example, Mansour was a professor in history at the famous Al-Azhar University of Cairo. Also these reformers did not use Orientalist

conclusions as proof for their beliefs, but came to their 'Qur'an alone' ideas based on Qur'anic verses. Only after reviewing these verses did they research the history of Hadith to further strengthen their belief that only the Qur'an can be used to understand what Islam is.

So her book is unique in its approach and its conclusions. Not only is the Qur'an-alone a historical and orthodox movement, Musa showed that throughout the centuries, the same Qur'an verses were used as arguments for only accepting the Qur'an as divine and only source for Islam. It is not a Western movement, nor even an Western Orientalist caused movement, but an authentic Islamic movement based on its core text, the Qur'an. Just as the Mu'tazilah writings have been systematically wiped out from the general Muslim libraries when they fell out of favor, the same has occurred with the Qur'an-alone writings over the centuries. Which in my eyes not only shows political influence in the debate (the rulers clearly wanted no traces remained, so the pro-Hadith gave them more wealth and power it seemed), but also that the arguments supporting Hadith were not as strong as the majority believes. Why eliminate a weak threat? The following of Hadith became dominant as there was no literature remaining that attacked this view. Maybe the future will produce some hidden treasures somewhere. But the modern Qur'an-alone writings can not be lost to history because of the Internet and modern printing, and so more and more Muslims will and are reading them and are being influenced by them. The movement is growing, not only because the Qur'an-alone movement has sound arguments from the Qur'an itself and historical proof of false Hadith, but also because the Qur'an is accepted by all sects and movements in Islam, while there are many disputes on what and which Hadith and tradition is accepted. And as mentioned above, the Qur'an is the only timeless, flexible and very open-source text that can withstand the criteria of modern human knowledge and thought.

It is viewed as more gender-neutral, more universal, very humanistic and scientific than the Hadith which reflects mostly 7-9th century mythology and cultural beliefs. Thus the Qur'an alone can not only be the vehicle to modernize and reform the Muslim world, but even start a new revolution of a socio-humanistic scientific faith which is demanded by modern-day scepticism and rationalism. The Medieval scientists of Islam who were the founders of the Renaissance and modern science, were scientific because of the Qur'an. Muslim society was so tolerant and progressive mostly because of the universality of the Qur'an, while the rest of the world was oppressive and backward, stooped in the dark ages. The increasing acceptance of the Hadith as divine source in Islam from the 9th century on, has slowly demolished the revolutionary system of the Qur'an and caused the majority Muslim world to fall into its deplorable state it is in now. The Qur'an alone is not a heresy, it is a revival.

Professor Musa's book is a groundbreaking study into a very important and growing, or as her study shows, a re-vitalized movement within Islam that can positively change the world. This book is superbly written and a must read.

"The role they (the Hadith) have played has been so influential for so long that both Muslims and non-Muslims alike generally assume they have always uncontested authority. However, a survey of Islamic history shows that the Hadith did not always enjoy such widespread acceptance and authority.[...] Ignorance of these early disputes has contributed to the common misconception that opposition to the Hadith as an authoritative scriptural source of law and guidance is a modern-day, Western, Orientalist-influenced heresy," [Introduction to the book]

Available at Amazon:

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